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**River City Youth Foundation's TechComunidad:
Latino Parent Education and Technology Training**

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**River City Youth Foundation's TechComunidad:
Latino Parent Education and Technology Training**

by

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Report

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2015

Acknowledgements

Les agradezco de corazón a todos los padres de Dove Springs que me dieron el honor de trabajar con ellos en TechComunidad. En especial le agradezco a Maria Luisa, una madre y abuela que es una persona sabia, fuerte y de quien aprendí mucho. I would like to thank Mona Gonzalez, Director of River City Youth Foundation, and Oné Musel-Gilley, two amazing and driven individuals, who gave me the opportunity to volunteer at River City Youth Foundation and be a part of TechComunidad. I would like to thank the RCYF staff, who always treated me like I was one of their own. I am especially grateful to Dr. Straubhaar for introducing me to RCYF. I will miss the visits to his office, advice, support and mentorship. I want to thank Dr. Urrieta for his apoyo. Muchas gracias a mis padres, Geronimo y Maria Torres, por los valores y la buena educación que me enseñaron. I would lastly like to thank my comadres and compadres who supported me from the beginning until the very end: Alysia, Carlota, Julie, Cruz, Martha, Adriana, Laurita, Perla, Angelica, Gracie, Stephanie, Wendy, Lorena, Cindy, Lovelys, Manny, Frank, Juan and Steve. I learned so much through this experience and I will never forget the importance of Latino parents in our schools and communities.

Abstract

River City Youth Foundation's TechComunidad: Latino Parent Education and Technology Training

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2015

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This report is about my own experiences with the digital divide in Austin and River City Youth Foundation's TechComunidad, a Latino parent education and technology training program, which takes place in Dove Springs. The paper explains the historical context of Austin's segregation and how problematic Austin became as a Technopolis. I include information on how non-profit organizations, such as Austin Interfaith, bring up the agenda items that affect children that live in poverty. The report speaks of the social and digital divide that is widening Austin. There is RCYF's TechComunidad program and Latino parents who have "funds of knowledge," which is knowledge that can only come from child's home. Latino parents may not be as familiar with the educational system in the U.S., but they are encouraging their children to obtain as much education as possible. I include the demographics of Dove Springs, which is a transitory immigrant community, and the elementary schools that feed into Mendez Middle School, where most River City Youth Foundation children attend. The project contains information on River City Youth Foundation and its goal to maintain the youth

involved in positive activities that encourages further education or career planning. This report represents the study of how Latino parents engage with technology by learning to use Chromebooks in RCYF's TechComunidad. The program trains parents to have mastery skills with email, search engines; and in addition, educates parents on how they can support their children in school. The report culminates with parent interviews and illustrates how TechComunidad can decrease the techno-divide for Latino parents' children and can possibly be offered in other Austin areas as a tool to decrease the high school dropout rate.

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1. Introduction

MY EXPERIENCE WITH THE DIGITAL DIVIDE IN AUSTIN

The name of this study is “River City Youth Foundation’s TechComunidad: Latino Parent Education and Technology Training”. The following project is a compilation of two reports. In the first report I speak about my personal Austin experience with the digital divide, present study information, digital divide background and introduce Dove Springs, (the area where I did my research). The second report provides information about River City Youth Foundation, the TechComunidad program, and finalizes with TechComunidad interviews and results.

I would have to say that my first experiences with the digital divide in Austin would have to be when I joined the Our Lady of Guadalupe (OLG) Catholic Church’s Adoration, Community, Theology, Service (ACTS) Core Group in Austin in 2010. ACTS derives from a church retreat that’s offered to Catholic Church members every year and originates from ACTS Missions in San Antonio, Texas. There are five on-going retreats at OLG that rotate throughout different times of the year; these are the Women’s English ACTS Retreat, Women’s Spanish ACTS Retreat, Men’s English ACTS Retreat, Men’s Spanish ACTS Retreat and the Teen ACTS Retreat. One major issue the group had was keeping track of the all people that had gone on an ACTS Retreat as this was helpful for future team formation. The lists helped determine which candidates would qualify to be ACTS Directors. The lists in turn helped the Director select the co-directors (typically two other individuals), and finally the list helped create the twenty-five

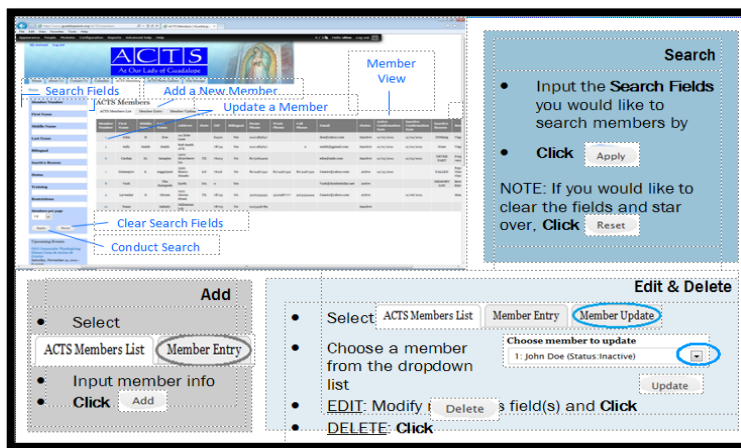
member team that would coordinate the next retreat; all members were required to have been to a retreat at least once.

There was an excel list that was becoming obnoxiously long with all the team and retreat participants along with information about each retreat held at Our Lady of Guadalupe since 2003. ACTS Core used Yahoo groups as a place to store information for ACTS Core and to disseminate information to all ACTS members in the community about the next retreat. After a while one of the former ACTS Core members relinquished the responsibility for the Yahoo group and told us that Yahoo would ultimately delete the “group” feature and we needed to find another online medium (Layla, “Yahoo! Groups cleanup questions & other concerns”). I thought it would be helpful to create a website that belonged exclusively to the OLG ACTS Core group and would not depend on free digital platforms that would expire. I worked at the University of Texas at Austin McCombs Business School during this time and because of my ongoing advising conversations, I learned that Management Information System (MIS) students were able to produce/enhance technology for any organization, company, or non-profit for free as a part of obtaining credit for one of their MIS courses. It gave them the opportunity to role-play working with a “client” on an online project and give them the experience to evaluate themselves and their team.

We worked with “Team Infinity,” as they called themselves, throughout the fall 2011 semester. ACTS Core bought a Domain, and the MIS students provided training, and seemed like a natural fit. However, there was one essential element that we blatantly missed, which was the lack of computer competency among ACTS members. Although

all members of ACTS Core, which was twelve (12), received training of how to access and update the website/database information, it became painfully apparent that many of the members weren't comfortable with technology. If I had asked the group more about what made sense for technology, I could have saved a lot of time/effort put into the tedious project. The UT students gave us short-cut/simple Quick Reference Guides (QRG) in English and Spanish so that we would know how add retreats, retreat participants, members and teach future ACTS Core members. In addition they also provided a comprehensive guide (see figure 1). After a year, one other ACTS Core member and I tried to keep up with the website, which kept having ongoing issues and the Domain suddenly expired.

Figure 1. Image of one of the Quick Reference Guides that was created by Team Infinity on how to add members on the Our Lady of Guadalupe ACTS website.



The OLG ACTS Core website failed at Our Lady of Guadalupe because we were unable to sustain the maintenance of this type of technology. Through my frustration at the time, I researched what other ACTS Core groups in other cities were using and

noticed that some also had expired Domains or were maintained by a website company called eCatholic from <http://www.ecatholicwebsites.com>. At the time, the Our Lady of Guadalupe ACTS Core group ages ranged from 35 to 60 year-old Latinos with high school education, vocational-technical backgrounds and only a few with undergraduate degrees. The advanced level of technical savvy required to maintain the website would have been impossible for us (including those with undergraduate degrees). I think what was eye opening for me was that many had not had any other real technology experience beyond using their email accounts at work.

Towards the end of my three-year commitment to ACTS Core, I resorted to print media by producing an OLG ACTS Newsletter and putting it in the Sunday bulletin for church distribution, and in a last attempt to be connected through social media, I included a Facebook web link. The newsletter was extremely well-received and ACTS members in our congregation looked forward to receiving other OLG ACTS Newsletters for more information as they were never aware of the existence of the now expired OLG ACTS Core website. Over time I kept finding out that many ACTS community members only had access to a computer at work and rarely did members have internet at home as they saw this as an added expense on their limited budgets. I currently maintain the OLG ACTS Core Facebook group as no one else has stepped forward to maintain the group, and I haven't belonged to ACTS Core since October of 2013. I rarely get prompted to upkeep the ACTS Core Facebook, but will post relevant announcements about the retreats. Even with the limited technology, I was thoroughly impressed with the community involvement and warmth for ACTS retreats. With or without the technology,

the end results of our church retreats at Our Lady of Guadalupe have been a success. The community was so connected with ACTS that we have had continuous access to plumbers, cooks, and licensed counselors, trailer hitches and many sorts of social and economic capital for the retreats.

My experience in higher education as an academic advisor at the University of Texas at Austin has been fruitful in navigating websites and accessing information on the UT website. I have found it interesting to see how much I help UT students find information. The questions I get from students typically range from information about the transferability of courses off campus, claiming credit by exam, signing up for an exam to test out of a subject, transferring to another school, and suitable study abroad programs. I know these are not easy questions to “Google,” or may be tricky, as they require multiple clicks on a webpage to find the information. Teaching students how to find information is an indispensable skill that academic advisors must be experts with at UT. I bring full attention in this project to my experience with technology at my church and at UT, because as difficult as it is to find information for adults who have been exposed to a computer and to students that have probably owned a laptop since they were in high school, can you imagine how daunting this kind of technology may be for a Latino parent who may not know how to turn on a computer?

River City Youth Foundation’s TechComunidad interested me because it made me think of my father and mother who only completed 4th grade and 6th grade education in Mexico. At the same time, I position myself and my two siblings as first generation

Mexican-American adults that have all successfully completed undergraduate degrees so

I can relate to some children's experiences in this study.

2. Study Information Research Objectives

The objective of my research is to investigate if the River City Youth Program's technology and Latino parent technology education program can be a tool that can help decrease the social, educational, and digital divides for Latino middle school children in other Austin locations. I attempt to apply and bridge the concepts "techno-disposition" and "funds of knowledge" the Latino parents learned/shared at the River City Youth Foundations' "TechComunidad," and exactly how this program is impacting parents. The name of the program TechComunidad itself is very clever as the "tech" portion refers to technology and "comunidad" refers to community.

TechComunidad is a six to eight week program where parents who have not had any experience with a computer will 1) develop mastery skills in utilizing an email account and 2) learn how to use search engines on a Chromebook. I studied TechComunidad to see if this is a program that can be implemented as a tool to ultimately help Latino children with their school experiences. I also evaluated the current benefits and limitations of the program for the parents.

METHODS

I conducted an ethnographic study by taking a participant-observer approach. By employing a participant-observer approach I was able to gain familiarity with all entities involved in my research. The River City Youth Foundation facility is located in the Dove Springs area which is southeast Austin, Texas. I explored the intersectionality of Bourdieu's relational theory which contends that a strand called "cultural capital" can be

theoretically acquired over an extended period of time (Straubhaar et al. 5-6) and bring to light “funds of knowledge” that Latino parents brought to the course and their own identity/agency of culture. There is a correlation with parent involvement or parent encouragement and how this can create social capital for their student.

Teachers who have direct contact with their student’s parents perceive the student to be obtaining higher academic achievement than those who have no contact with them (Kupermine, Darnell, Alvarez-Jimenez 472, 480). Although there are complex layers in the Latino parent involvement and schools, there is also research that indicates that children can be successful if they have cultural values and practices that can only come from the home, which includes to be “bien educado” (*well-mannered*) and children learning from parents’ “consejos” (*advice*), or being shown the importance of having a hard work ethic (Moreno and Valencia 203). Despite studies demonstrating that students have a sense of belonging with the school if the parents have been involved with their school (Kupermine, Darnell, Alvarez-Jimenez 478-479), there are also many cultural values that influence students’ success.

This research is important as the current amount of Latinos with ages 3 and older make up about 25% of the enrollment population in the public education system in the United States (Lopez and Fry, “Among recent high school grads, Hispanic college enrollment surpasses that of Whites”). This is even higher in Austin as Austin Independent School District’s, “Demographic Analysis and Student Projections for Austin Independent School District 2012-2013 Update,” indicated the Hispanic population in the school district was at 38% in reviewing 2006-2010 numbers (Harner

15). Education is important for Latino parents as eighty-six percent believe that college offers a better future, compared to 54 percent of other parents (McGlynn 2009).

I think parents play a key role in their children's lives and in addition to being parents, they provide their children with, "Funds of Knowledge," which is described as "the relationship between knowledge that emerges from households' economic and labor resources, and the uses of these as valuable cultural resources for practical skills and education in schools" (Villenas and Moreno 673). Unfortunately, sometimes the parent's own cultural and cognitive resources can be dismissed and not recognized when addressing what "social capital" may mean (Moll, et al. 134). Exactly how has RCYF has created "techno-capital" in Dove Springs and at the same time actually embraces the culture of the parents for retention?

The one-on-one interviews for my research were conducted at RCYF and/or a convenient location for the parents, children and staff and. I ensured that the interviews were conducted in a language and space was most convenient for the interviewee. Observations and interviews with parents and staff have the objective of capturing how the "techno-divide" can be decreased. The populations I interviewed included three formal interviews with parents prior, or a week into the course, 2 children, one River City Youth staff and final informal interviews with a couple of parents. I wanted to get a sense of what the parents' motives for taking the course, how much technology the children currently knew in the home, and the overall results at the end of the course. The TechComunidad research extended from November of 2014 to April of 2015 to measure and capture the impact of the program on parents. I attended and assisted the

TechComunidad evening courses January 14, 2015 through March 24, 2015, twice a week for two hours. I interviewed parents and a staff member in April of 2015, after the parents had completed their final exam.

3. Background on the Digital Divide

SEGREGATION HISTORY

Why is it that an organization like River City Youth Foundation had to be established in the Dove Springs neighborhood? Exactly what was happening prior to the inception of the program? In order to understand how Dove Springs became known as a high-risk area it is important to delve into the formation of segregation in Austin from the 1900's.

Formal segregation for African Americans in Austin was instituted in 1928 by a city-zoning plan (Straubhaar, et al. 42-46) creating a poverty area in East Austin. There was not similar formal segregation of Latinos, but several kinds of pressure were applied to get them to move to East Austin as well. At one point, Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic church was purposely moved into East Austin in an attempt to move Mexican-Americans out of Central West Austin. Many of the *abuelitas* (grandmothers) will tell you the story of how they built the church that is currently located in east Austin by selling thousands and thousands of tamales. They will proudly tell you about their ongoing *tamaladas* (tamale making) every weekend. Latino families will organize and work to find solutions and this is where they are wealthy in social capital, because of the fostered relationships they build and will work hard together when there is a financial hardship. I remember one of my spiritual mentors tell me how they would load up the trunk of the car to go sell the tamales from house to house.

The damming of the Colorado River made the area 6th and Guadalupe over to Lamar and 2nd Street and the river more desirable as previously it was a flood zone, so the

city wanted to use the former Mexican American barrio for Anglo businesses (Straubhaar et al. 41, 40). Racist policies targeted at African Americans trickled down to all other groups that were not “White” during the 19th century and early 20th, especially a the height of the Jim Crow era in the 1920s-30s, when Latino immigration to Austin also increased after the Mexican Civil War of the 1910s-20s. In February of 1927, the Texas legislature allowed Texas cities to pass ordinances that encouraged the separation of Whites from African Americans because they believed it created “peace, safety, and welfare” (Straubhaar et al. 43). Because the Texas Court of Appeals overturned this law, Austin decided to reach out to a consulting firm, Koch & Fowler, which began planning the layout of the city, thus planting the first seeds of segregation that would affect the social divide for African-American and Mexican American families until today (Straubhaar et al. 43). Realtors cooperated with segregation, so African-Americans and Mexican-Americans were denied when they wished to purchase lands in areas that were not located in East Austin. The city purposely created resources for African Americans by building things, such as a large public housing program in East Austin (Busch 8). They validated these measures by saying, “this will eliminate the necessity of white and black schools, white and black parks, and other duplicate facilities for this area” (Straubhaar et al. 43).

During the 1950’s-1970’s schools were gradually required to desegregate but these attempts sometimes hurt Mexican-American and African-American youth as they were transported to the White schools and some of their own schools were torn down (Straubhaar et al. 52, 54). These attempts to desegregate made the African-Americans

and Mexican-Americans feel like their own schools were not adequate enough or good enough to have been “chosen”. Mexican-Americans were pushed further south and some moved to South East Austin, now known as the Dove Springs area. Exactly how has this segregation affected the social divide in Austin, and how have social justice groups and non-profits like RCYF tried to address this?

TALKING ABOUT THE POVERTY/SOCIAL DIVIDE

In February of 2015, the Austin American Statesmen published a three piece Report called “Austin most economically segregated major metro area in U.S.” and this affects the youth as they have found that metro areas where the housing and income are lower, the young residents will climb higher up in the income levels (Zehr). Highly segregated areas, whether segregated by race or income, limit the ability of poorer people to accumulate the capital, whether economic, cultural, technological, or social to achieve upward mobility. Coleman describes social capital as being “productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible” (Straubhaar et al. 98). When there is an absence, it creates a social divide, which creates the gap between the rich and the poor (Kassam, et al. 215).

I have lived in Austin for thirteen years and I am active in the Social Justice Ministry at Our Lady of Guadalupe, which is located off of East 7th street. Our church belongs to an organization called Austin Interfaith; a coalition of 35+ congregations, public schools, nonprofits, and unions, who work together on issues that affect the well-being of families and neighborhoods in our community; much of my information is

gathered from field work grounded in these efforts. The re-organization of city council into representation by district brought out the economic and other disparities of the districts. As I was listening to the descriptions of District One and District Nine at an Accountability Session on October 13, 2014 at Mount Olive Baptist Church, the Austin Interfaith chairs painted a clear picture of the differences that exists in this cosmopolitan city.

Although Austin on the surface creates an inviting environment for food, entertainment, and intellectual stimulation, on a deeper level it has an open wound of inequality. The district boundaries for District One (1) extends all the way from 7th Street up to as far north hitting Palmer. Its west and east boundaries are East of I-35 to the Toll Road-130. District Nine's (9) north and south borders are 51st Street to Oltorf St. Its west and east boundaries extend from the Mopac Expressway to Manor Road.

The Austin Interfaith co-chairs commented on how the disparities are apparent with District #1 not even having dignified restrooms for homeless people. This is evident if you ever go through the East area and see the amount of homelessness in Central East Austin, and similar to District #9 (although described with mansions containing up five restrooms); it has a growing homeless population in the area without access to restrooms as well. The chairs also noted that the cost of living in Austin has increased significantly, as rent has increased up to 50% in the last ten years, but wages have only increased by 9%. This cost of living is affecting the children of Austin, especially in East Austin. This has caused parents to carry a heavy financial burden to support their families in a city that is becoming a haven for the haves and a detrimental situation for the have-nots.

According the City of Austin demographer Ryan Robinson, the poverty rate for Austin is 20%, for Greater Austin it is 15.5%, and for Texas as a whole it is 17.9% (see figure 2). Austin is unfortunately winning in the poverty rate percentages. Almost 30% of those children that are younger than 5 years old are living in poverty.

There is an associated racial disparity that is clear in the slide below, and this mirrors what happens when the social divide is wide open (see figure 2). The compilation of this data demonstrates the outrageous inequality with numbers that show that only 7% of Caucasian children are living in poverty, while 45% of Latino children are living in poverty and 53% of African-American children are living in poverty (see figure 2).

Figure 2. The Poverty Rates by Age Group, Race and Ethnicity for 2012

Poverty Rates by Age Group, Race and Ethnicity
City of Austin
American Community Survey, 2012, 1-year Estimates Series, Table D17001

Table I: Poverty Rates (1)

Category or Group	Overall Population	non-Hispanic White	African American	Hispanic	Asian
Overall Population	20.3%	11.7%	30.6%	31.1%	16.2%
Under Age 5	29.5%	6.7%	52.9%	44.0%	9.2%
Under Age 18	30.0%	8.0%	52.7%	44.8%	6.0%
Age 65 Plus	9.0%	6.4%	13.3%	14.4%	12.6%

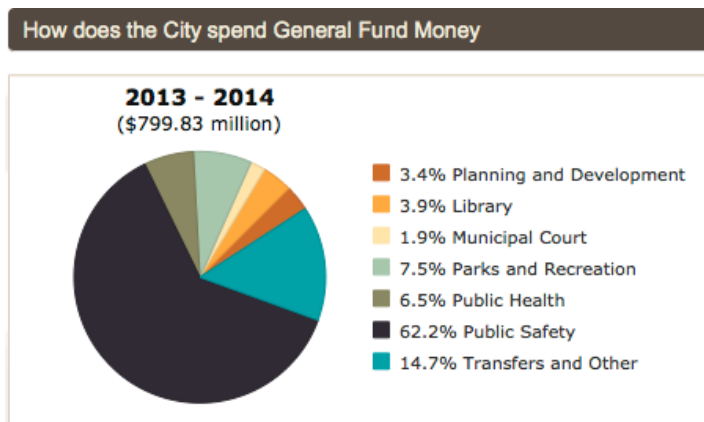
NOTES:
(1) The source for data behind this table on Poverty in metropolitan Austin is the American Community Survey, which is produced by the US Census Bureau. Data for this table are from the 2012 1-year Estimates Series. Poverty rates are calculated for only the portion of the total population that lives within a household; poverty rates are not calculated for institutionalized persons or individuals living within Group Quarters situations. The Poverty Rate is a function of total annual household income and the number of individuals within a household. The 2012 Poverty threshold for a family of four was \$23,550.

Source: City of Austin Office of Demographics, presentation by Ryan Robinson for Austin Interfaith in May of 2014 in Austin, Texas. Red highlights and labels by Austin Interfaith.

The City of Austin General Budget for 2013-2014 demonstrates the lack of support for Austin children as they only receive twenty-one (\$0.21) cents budgeted from City General Revenue. The money spent on children falls into three different areas: Parks and Recreation, Libraries, and Public Health (see figure 3). Parks and Recreation is a crucial component as children and families are able to access free swimming pools with lifeguards during the summer and keep their bodies active instead of watching TV at home when they are not in school. Visiting the parks is a great way to also be active and have family time. The monies designated for libraries enable children to have access to books, but many do not have Bilingual librarians, which make communication difficult for Latino parents. Libraries are also the main means by which poor children in East Austin access computers and the internet. East Austin libraries are short-staffed and therefore have earlier closing times and lack “reading time” programs. Through Public Health and Human Services, children would have vital health and human services, where they benefit from prime time after school programming (as hard-working parents make their way home, children should be engaged in an enriching after school activity). It also provides youth job training to build a stronger employable workforce for the future. However, in 2014 they cut after-school programming from \$800,000 to \$0; considerable intervention by Austin Interfaith raised its budget back by only two thirds. Over sixty-two percent of the city budget in Austin is spent on Public Safety (62%), ensuring that more money is spent locking up some of the juveniles, instead of providing strong

educational or youth leadership programs to keep youth in positive directions and out of jail.

Figure 3. The City of Austin General Fund Money Distribution



Source: City of Austin Financial Documents for 2013-2014
(https://austintexas.gov/financeonline/finance/financial_docs.cfm?ws=1&pg=1).

DIGITAL DIVIDE/TECHNO-CAPITAL

Assessing the digital divide is extremely complex. One reason is that it is difficult to confine/define an area that impacts a community on a larger scale. To even begin to describe the digital divide it is necessary to introduce some theoretical language derived from Bourdieu by Straubhaar, et al 2012, surrounding technology. Techno-dispositions are described as “indicators as social practices, perceptions and attitudes, technical education, awareness of technology, desire for information, job requirements, social relations, community interactions, and geographic location” (Straubhaar et al. 9).

Techno-capital is acquired through acting on techno-dispositions to learn more about

technology. The social divide is problematic because it speaks to the increased gap between the rich and poor (Kassam 216).

AUSTIN AS A PROBLEMATIC TECHNOLPOLIS

Austin was the ideal candidate for becoming the technopolis as essential components were in place: a college town, some basic chip fabrication plants, computer entrepreneurship by graduates from the university, a beautiful landscape, and a city flourishing with systems and global networks. In a sense with the technology would be a natural fit for Austin as demonstrated by Milor, Gibson, and Kozmetsky in the 1990's (Straubhaar et al. 11). Austin made by positive gains to be a high-technology city, but unfortunately any gains made for the "wealthy technology elite," did not trickle to lower income minority residents that lived in East and South Austin (Straubhaar et al. 76). There was the hope in planning the technopolis that there would be a domino effect with all of the technology companies moving to Austin (not only positions for people with technical skills, but also positions where people with lower educational backgrounds would benefit). Technology was coming to Austin, and people thought there would be recruitment from current city residents to be able to take positions in the jobs for these companies. Unfortunately, even with training programs, there were fewer successful cases of poor residents moving up into the technology economy that planners had hoped. For example after three years through one program study; of the twenty-three participants, only two participants had minor career boosts in in Austin (Straubhaar et al.

99). Now that we have addressed the problematics of the technopolis, we need to address the issues with access for the younger generations.

There has been a concern to address this as an issue of “access” with regards to African-American and Latino youth and how they are connected with media but more specifically with media that includes, “television, music, video games, books, DVDs” (Kassam et al. 216). There is a sense that African-American and Latino youth are missing opportunities to be empowered socially, scholastically, and civically through media and that there is therefore no longer an access gap, but rather a “participation gap” (Kassam et al. 217). What is important to note is that “access alone does not signify equity of education – it is how the technology is used and is in fact integrated into education institutions and the lives of students that determine its contribution to equity” (Kassam, et al. 219). Ingle describes it as “smartness, in this context, translated into learning to use technology appropriately and effectively as a tool, as contrasted with the phenomenon of ‘technology addiction’ (95). First generation Latino students sometimes may need remedial courses for math or writing but there is also a need to increase their technological literacy (Ingle 97).

Although there may be free learning resources, there is an “unequal awareness of online informal learning tools” as many of these resources may be catering to privileged people, or they may not reflect the cultural values of underserved-populations, hence further widening the educational gap (Roshan et al. 132). Parents are vital in the technology formation of children as they can serve in two fundamental roles: “(1) *Learning Broker*, when parents seek learning opportunities for the children; and 2)

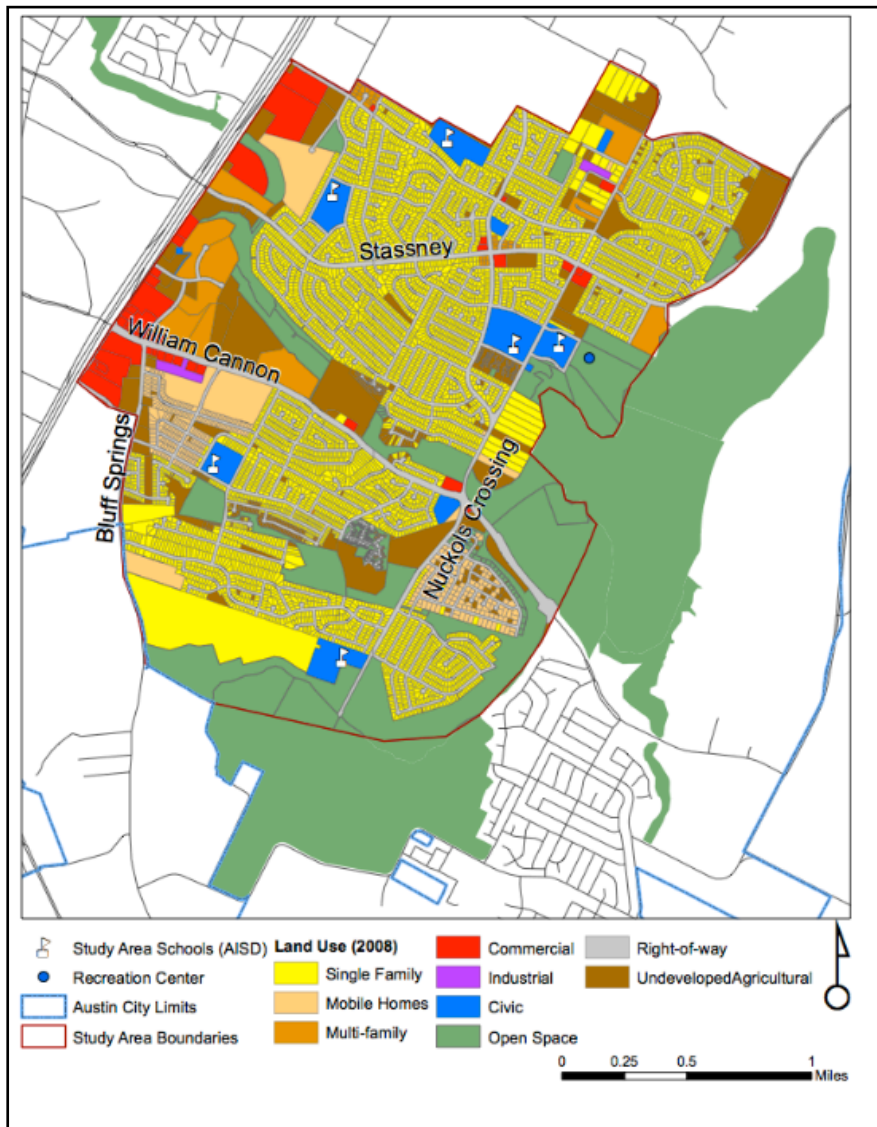
Resource Provider, when parents supply resources beyond the family computer,” such as giving their children educational tools for advancement (Roshan et al. 133). When children come from a financially strained home, there is the need to “share” the smart phone, tablet, laptop, or desktop and having multiple users causes tensions between siblings or parents and children (Roshan et al. 135). Security is another major concern as families do not have appropriate antivirus software, and therefore limit the websites that children can access since they don’t want their only technical apparatus compromised (Roshan et al. 134-135). As parents are wary of online websites their children browse, the children miss out on online educational opportunities (Roshan et al.135). How does River City Youth Foundation help parents in the Dove Springs area? What do parents in Dove Spring know and not know already when supporting their children’s education?

4. Dove Springs Overview

DEMOGRAPHICS/LATINO POPULATION

Dove Springs is located in South Austin and is shown below (see figure 4).

Figure 4. Land Use Map of Dove Springs



Source: Dove Springs Neighborhood Analysis: A Planning Oriented Study of Public Health & Built Environment (“The State of Dove Springs” 10).

The information presented on Dove Springs comes from comprehensive reports and analysis developed between 2010-2014, but the numbers are derived from Census numbers from the year 2000. Dove Springs is home to about 36,000 residents and about 13,000 are youth under the age of 19 (rivercityyouth.com). Gonzalez' described Dove Springs as an immigration transitory space, a home to many that are coming from different places, including from other places in the U.S. Dove Springs has the highest Latino population in Austin and is made up of 19% of people that are immigrants ("The State of Dove Springs" 5). Within the immigrant Latino population eight out of ten are not citizens ("The State of Dove Springs" 5). In the year 2000 almost 50% of the Dove Springs residents were mostly monolingual Spanish speakers ("The State of Dove Springs" 7). The family breakdowns are 61% Latino, 26% non-Hispanic whites, and 13% African American ("The State of Dove Springs" 8).

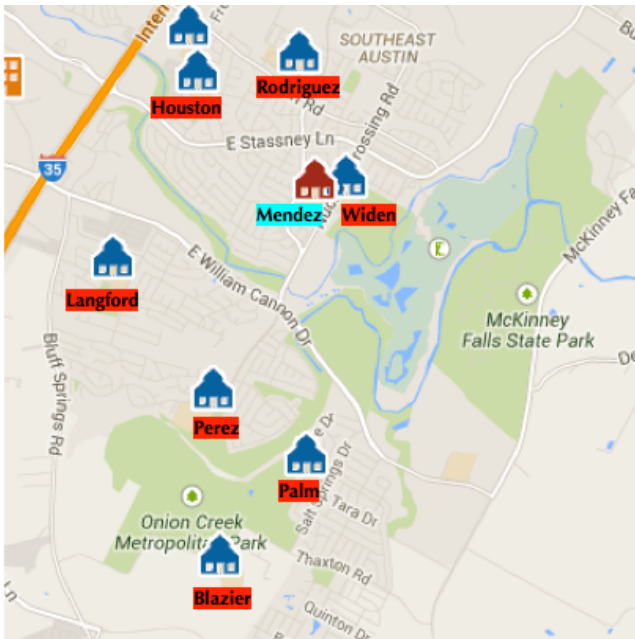
I have lived in Dove Springs since 2006 and I thought homeownership was pretty high because most of my neighbors told me they had lived in their homes for at least ten years prior to when I had moved there. I recalled my realtor's top selling point for me when he stated, "This is an old established neighborhood" in 2005. Recently, I have noticed that a couple of houses have been sold and have become rentals, so I was not surprised to see that the Latino home ownership is between 58%-76% ("The State of Dove Springs" 8). This means that the children in who belong to the River City Youth Program may be living temporarily in the area, or live in homes that are rentals. Consequently, although River City Youth Foundation provides service to families that

have been with the organization for many years, they may serve transitory families as well.

DOVE SPRINGS SCHOOLS

It is important to review the elementary schools in Dove Springs that filter into the only middle school in the area, Mendez Middle School and all are a part of the Austin Independent School District (AISD). They include: Blazier Elementary School, Houston Elementary School, Langford Elementary School, Palm Elementary School, Perez Elementary School, Rodriguez Elementary School, Widen Elementary, and most recently a new Charter Schools such as Harmony School of Excellence moved into the area. All of the elementary schools in Dove Springs have a partnership with RCYF. The following image (see figure 5) maps out all of the elementary schools within Dove Springs that filter into Mendez Middle School. Since there is no high school in Dove Springs, middle school children will transition either into Akins High School or William B. Travis High School.

Figure 5. Elementary schools in proximity to Mendez Middle School labeled



Source: AISD Interactive map found at austinisd.org/bond/interactive-map, contains AISD schools and schools labeled by Juanita Gonzalez.

In looking at the high school dropout rate, Akins had a 3.7% (seems relatively low) compared to William B. Travis High School which had a 16.8% drop out rate (“The State of Dove Springs” 18). There was also a significant difference in the poverty level between the two high schools, so this could be a major factor. At Akins High School it is reported that 53.8% of the students were “Economically Disadvantaged” compared to 78.9% at Travis High School, which represents a 25% difference in 2005 (“The State of Dove Springs” 18). At a national level, although the Latino dropout rate at the high school level has decreased significantly from 32% in 2000 to 15% in 2012, they are still dropping out (Lopez and Fry, “Among recent high school grads, Hispanic college enrollment surpasses that of Whites”). The high school dropout rate can be addressed

earlier on and students could be pipelined into higher education instead of the juvenile system. Although there should be concerns with the low Latino enrollment in the K-12 level, most alarming is the level of students that are not in higher education (Contreras 17).

5. Overview of River City Youth Foundation

HISTORY

This second report provides information about River City Youth Foundation, the TechComunidad program, and gives examples of the experiences the Latino parents had in their technology and education program. I think programs from River City Youth Foundation can make a meaningful impact on the social divide for Latino parents because there can be intervention early on for parents through techno capital, parent education, and learning about the educational needs of their children. RCYF offers a cultural and linguistic world that youth are familiar with (Villenas and Foley 185).

River City Youth Foundation has historically worked with the youth to make sure they are engaged in activities that will benefit them in the future. They have their own group of middle school students involved in “Build Your Future” program. The organization’s BYF program promotes mentoring and fostering relationships between the youth and RCYF staff. The staff will play sports or teach the students how to use technology. Sometimes the BYF students will be asked to assist with large events, which in turn can encourage the students to be engaged in their community and give them a sense of responsibility of doing positive things and can spill over into their academics.

River City Youth Foundation was founded by Mona Gonzalez in 1983 and according to their website over 250,000 families have been served through their program in 25 years (rivercityyouth.com). River City Youth Foundation is a non-profit organization that was created to combat street crime and is located in Dove Springs, a high-risk area in Travis County (rivercityyouth.com). RCYF offers seven service areas

which include mentoring, counseling and case management, substance abuse prevention, technology, health and wellness, college and career, and community development. Over three thousand youth and families are served annually through annual community activities, which promote a family-friendly neighborhood in which to raise safe, healthy, and happy children (rivercityyouth.com).

Gonzalez molded a vision that would be responsive to the neighborhoods' needs in Dove Springs by creating River City Youth Foundation. Something that is extremely relevant about RCYF is their approach accessing equity for Dove Springs' children. They know that it is very important that community participation, and interactions with parents and children must be culturally linked to the families (Reimers 28). The organization prides itself in always being culturally sensitive; they work with the families in ways that always make them feel welcomed. This resonates with a statement Gonzalez made in another interview in 2001 as to how she selects her staff, "she needed to hire someone with a social work background, who would teach technology, yet accurately understand the background and difficulties of the children in the neighborhood (Welter 2). I remember my parents always taught me that the first thing you do when you have a visitor at the house is you ask them if they would like something to drink, and at RCYF there always seems to be an endless supply of food and snacks readily available to the children or their families.

Gonzalez' describes the children as "brimming with possibilities" and she sees the children needing to be the focus of any neighborhood. She said that Austin is a magnet for so much of the world's talent and saw that the "Athens on the Colorado" also

contained very poor neighborhoods. Before establishing herself in Dove Springs, she was mobile throughout Austin in working with non-profit organizations to offer resources to communities that were living in poverty. Austin Independent School District and Elena Vela, the former principal of William B. Travis High School, wanted Gonzalez to be a catalyst to change the area because the youth were full of talent but they were being pulled into drugs, gangs, violence and things that would land them into the justice system (Gonzalez, Juanita. Personal interview. 29 November 2014.).

When River City Youth Foundation began there was a lot of gang activity and graffiti. There was no local municipal infrastructure, so literally there was no place for the youth to go to expend their energy. Gonzalez recalls that they had to do community reclamation, mobilize the community, create neighborhood associations, and put united efforts with churches and people that had been living there for years to solidify the municipal infrastructure the area lacked. Working with the city government, the neighborhood was able to acquire a recreation center, a community swimming pool, a library and soccer fields among other available recreational areas and activities (Gonzalez, Juanita. Personal interview. 29 November 2014.).

In addition to the crime activity in the area during the 1990's there were many at-risk migrant students. Migrant worker youth at Travis High School were susceptible to not finishing high school because of their constantly mobile life with their families in following the crops for work and this prevented them from completing their courses. Migrant youth had a 75% drop out rate (Garza, "When Education Offers the Only Way Out"). During the 1990's, Travis High School's principal established block schedules,

where the youth could earn credit for courses by allowing the courses to have more time within the week and earn the credit in a shorter time (Garza, “When Education Offers the Only Way Out”).

Gonzalez said they started by working out of the trunks of cars, using soccer balls, basketballs, and books. They knew they needed an office. They used a space in a small housing project called Eastern Oaks, then they acquired a little office where “La Placita” restaurant is now located (5310 S. Pleasant Valley, Austin, TX 78744). She recalls how they would get graffiti on their walls every night and they would need to clean it up the following morning (Gonzalez, Juanita. Personal interview. 29 November 2014.). A couple by the name of David and Gayanne Vandam purchased a two acre abandoned lot nearby and although they initially thought they would invest in the property for a future business venture, but the family knew all of the things RCYF was doing and they generously donated it to RCYF. Page Southerland Page, a multidisciplinary architecture and engineering firm, used all of their resources and volunteers to build their youth technology center (rivercityyouth.com).

In 1999 RCYF was recognized with a National Keep America Beautiful Award and they were further able to create a vibrant, and beautiful park and recreation site, along with a technology center. Gonzalez’ has accumulated a wealth of leadership and awards for her endless contributions to community revitalization through RCYF’s effective programs. She also serves on the boards of the Casey Family Program/Foundation, Austin Free-Net, the ACC Center for Community-Based Nonprofit Organizations, and the KLRU Hispanic Advisor Board (rivercityyouth.com).

FAMILY STRENGTHENING EVENTS

RCYF prides itself in holding family strengthening events which includes their Annual Easter Egg Hunt, Annual Father's Day Parade & Fiesta, Annual Start the Peace Concert, Annual Merry Memories (Christmas) Holiday, and their once or twice a year, TechComunidad among others (rivercityyouth.com). In June of 2014, River City Youth Foundation hosted their 14th Annual Father's Day Parade and Fiesta and this event is important to Gonzalez' as she feels through his event the fathers are recognized for their hard work and contribution to their families. She states, "It's a strong message that we feel needs to be broadcast, not just across Dove Springs, but across America" (Robards-Forbes, "Fathers' role celebrated in Dove Springs Saturday").

They held their Annual Merry Memories Holiday at the Dove Springs Recreation Center and this was an opportunity for children and their parents to receive free gifts donated by local sponsors. Gonzalez' said that the previous year, one mother had arrived early because she really wanted to get a bicycle for her son. She hoped that she had the winning raffle ticket for the bike and patiently waited and was relieved to have ended up winning one (Gonzalez, Juanita. Personal interview. 29 November 2014.). Last year, Musel-Gilley reached out to me to see about volunteering for their "17th Annual Merry Memories" event on Saturday, December 6, 2014 at the Dove Spring Recreation Center. This was such a fun event for the whole family as there are a lot of free bikes, gifts, and prizes that are given out to the families. It's such a memorable experience for the Dove Springs families. I only arrived a bit for the set-up and take down of the event and I remember seeing a lot of families with gifts leaving the event. These events, which are

culturally relevant and family-centered, strengthen the families in Dove Springs and their connection to RCYF.

TECHNOLOGY ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN

Through my experiences as a volunteer during the summer of 2014, I was able to watch two particularly interesting activities on how students are utilizing technology at River City Youth Foundation. They had a summer camp where they had Movie Week and they had a Career Day. The Movie Week project had been successful during the spring semester that they decided to bring it back for the summer. The students chose a script from classic movies including, E.T., Forest Gump, Jaws, Skyfall 007, and Star Wars. They were asked to re-create a movie scene that they had selected from their script. Within their team, they selected their director, producer, and actors. They were very creative with their costumes, as the children have limited resources. They actually used yellow yarn to create a wig for E.T. in a scene. They also selected different locations to shoot their movies with cameras owned by RCYF (Gonzalez, Juanita. Fieldnotes. 17 July 2014.) .

I noticed that RCYF staff had actually driven the students to McKinney Falls to shoot for Jaws along the bank of the water. I could tell that the organization allowed the students to utilize their creativity to their maximum capability by doing this. Once they had completed their movie shots, they were able to use technology to edit sound. In addition, they were expected to create a poster that would promote their movie. I was fortunate enough to be a judge for the completion of their projects and saw the finalized

movie projects. The rubrics created by Musel-Gilley, manager of RCYF, were extremely thorough to determine the maximum amount of points a group based on their learning that week. They set up a whole stage of “Movie Day” at RCYF where parents could come and view their movies and partake in their event. The posters were actually printed in larger sizes and RCYF had popcorn and hotdogs available for everyone. I think the culmination of their projects was significant as their peers and parents could be there to view their work. What made the experience remarkable for the students was that the first place winners won a \$200 gift certificate that was to be divided among the group. I watched as Mona Gonzalez, RCYF Director, personally gave out the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place winners their prizes (Gonzalez, Juanita. Fieldnotes. 17 July 2014.).

On Career Day, the students were asked to look up two potential careers they want to consider in the future. They were asked to fill out a questionnaire and based on how well they filled out the questionnaire; they would acquire points for future fieldtrips. They were to state basic facts about the job, which included the salary and things they found interesting about the job. A couple of them struggled for while with YouTube videos and finally some students actually stumbled across a good website which was the U.S. Department of Labor that has an Occupational Outlook Handbook online about jobs- <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/>. This website helped answer almost all of their questions on the questionnaire (Gonzalez, Juanita. Fieldnotes. 25 July 2014.). After they were done with the first handout, they had to finish a second handout, which listed specific college schools and what degrees they would need to complete in order to get into the career they wanted. I was able to help many of them because of my experience with the UT website.

The list included Austin Community College, UT at Austin, and Texas A&M. They also had to indicate the certificate or degree they needed to complete and what city the college was located in. I remember a joke that a student said, “He is asking in what city the University of Dallas is located in, hahaha.” As I was helping students, I noticed a couple of careers that were hard to figure out which major was best suited. For example one boy wanted to be a pilot or to be an astronaut for NASA and figuring which certificate at the Austin Community College would help him achieve his goal required that we look up more information about the certificates offered through their college (Gonzalez, Juanita. Fieldnotes. 25 July 2014.). This experience was eye-opening as how technology is important to the students, how it could help them find things, once they had some guidance as to what they were looking for. Although I learned how technology is important to students, at the time I was looking forward to the parent technology education, TechComunidad.

6. TechComunidad

HISTORY OF TECHCOMUNIDAD

The goals of TechComunidad, which is aimed primarily at parents, are modest in terms of technology learning, per se. Oné Musel-Gilley, founder of TechComunidad, says that the ultimate goals of TechComunidad is 1) for parents to have complete mastery of email and 2) for parents to know how to utilize search engines. TechComunidad also puts a lot of energy into broader parent education about how to help their children and have better prospects for work and social inclusion. Technology is to help with these larger goals. Throughout the program she makes sure the instructors ask the parents bookmark weblinks that can help parents with their children.

She explained how in 2007 she was an integral part of, “Feria Para Aprender,” which was a large event launched with Austin ISD that was innovative. They had never had an event that would target Spanish speaking parents. Their focus was to link as many organizations and non-profits with the parents so they would be better able to guide their children from pre-kindergarten to college. She thought it was important because growing up, she saw that the more parental involvement there is in the students’ lives, the more likely the student would succeed. She feels that any program that only focuses on the youth would be missing out on the parents (Gonzalez, Juanita. Personal interview. 25 November 2014.).

She has always had a passion for technology and in traveling through many large cities in the U.S. with a version of “Feria Para Aprender,” the program that was going to change families and their lives; the parents couldn’t sustain it because of technology.

Musel-Gilley learned that although they had put a lot of energy into putting on such a monumental event with numerous entities that were trained on how to target/market Spanish speaking families and getting their agency's information into the hands of Latinos, they lacked two essential elements; the families lacked technology access and information or training about how to use computers and the internet (Gonzalez, Juanita. Personal interview. 25 November 2014.). She noted this when she followed up with families after the event and asked, "So we taught you about this youth program, about this non profit?" and the frequent response from parents was, "Well, I didn't sign up" or "I couldn't sign up because they had an online form to sign up, or I asked to go to their website and I couldn't go to the website". She stated that she wanted to create a program that was culturally sensitive and one that sticks and was education focused (Gonzalez, Juanita. Personal interview. 25 November 2014.).

Musel-Gilley realized that RCYF needed to educate parents about technology. It was particularly more important for her was to target those families that don't know how to turn on a computer. She feels strongly about building children's education for increased skills. Dell gave RCYF the opportunity to work with them because they saw that TechComunidad would be different and innovative, and it would also create a partnership (Gonzalez, Juanita. Personal interview. 25 November 2014.) . RCYF has been offering TechComunidad, a parent education technology program, which strives to empower parents and students by addressing the digital divide in a unique way since 2012.

TECHCOMUNIDAD KICK-OFF EVENT

Parents

TechComunidad began in on November 15, 2014 with a Kick-off event where parents are put into different groups, which would rotate through different kinds of learning and computer use, and the children that were five years and older were also put into groups. What I found remarkable was the childcare provided for free at a neighboring church. RCYF has built strong community relationships and the church has been instrumental when they have space issues. Musel-Gilley indicated that it was important to have parents know that they are able to see their child through Skype whenever they wish to during the day. She said this alleviates a lot of stress for them because they don't have to find a babysitter and they know they can see their child through a computer at any instant (Gonzalez, Juanita. Fieldnotes. 15 November 2014.).

First the parents listened to a motivational speech by Fernando Paz, Executive Director from Dell, as he recounted his story of coming from a low-income background living in a duplex with many family members and how his educational pathway has led him to a successful career with Dell. Parents identify with him because of his familiar story of living in poverty, coming from a Latino immigrant background, and most importantly he spoke to them in Spanish (Gonzalez, Juanita. Fieldnotes. 15 November 2014.). I clearly saw how “funds of knowledge” had transpired through the aspirations Paz’ family gave him as he gave a lot of credit of his success to his home life and how their encouragement formed him into an ambitious adult. It is essential ingredient that

RCYF has, which is to access the Spanish language with parents as a way to build relationships and validate Latino parents' cultural background (Valverde 71).

Then parents were separated again into their respective groups, so they could rotate through different learning experiences, and be able to use a computer. Perhaps many for them it is the first time in their lives that they log onto a computer and then log on to an email account. They are each given a piece of paper with specific tasks they must complete that day. They are asked to do different exercises on the desktops such as locating specific email content, copying and pasting images and sending these through email on a word document. The parents have someone guiding them over their shoulder and they have the one-on-one coaching by volunteers that are mostly students from the University of Texas (Gonzalez, Juanita. Fieldnotes. 15 November 2014).

I participated in their program as an instructor in the Kick-Off event and was given a specific outline of what I needed to present to the parents by Musel-Gilley. I presented to parents on how through the TechComunidad course they will learn to find many resources including how to find scholarships, a FAFSA YouTube video, a website that compares colleges (as far as required scores to enroll, tuition costs, etc.), and find articles on how they can help their child. The end goal was to have parents see how they can help their middle children access higher education in the future. The concepts taught at TechComunidad are to reflect the direct result of RCYF's goals, which are to get children in the Dove Springs area to think about the goals and college careers they can consider in the future (Gonzalez, Juanita. Fieldnotes. 15 November 2014).

At the end of my presentation, I showed the parents a picture of my own parents. I tell them the story of how my own father only completed the 4th grade level and my mother finished the 6th grade in Zimapán, Hidalgo, Mexico. I tell them about the strong work-ethic that my father taught me and how he also taught me that I could achieve many things through my schooling. I tell them how my mother took many ESL courses and as an older adult she became a U.S. citizen. I told them that I was taught to work as a migrant farmworker in Idaho because my father told me if you work in something really hard, you will never fear any type of work. I saw his job first hand and I was able to acquire skills in how to manage time and figure out how paychecks worked. I was able to use the “funds of knowledge” provided by my fathers work experience. In a way I wanted for the parents at TechComunidad to see what a difference they do make and I wanted to point out the direct impact they make on their children’s success. Ultimately the Kick-Off event is a way for parents to get a glimpse of what is to come in their next six to eight weeks through TechComunidad (Gonzalez, Juanita. Fieldnotes. 15 November 2014.).

Children

While the parents are in their own technology experiences, the children that were separated initially are put in to color groups which was clarified by Musel-Gilley: yellow groups are the 5-6 year-olds, purple groups are 7-9 year-olds, green 10-13 year-olds, aqua 14-17 year-olds (Gonzalez, Juanita. Personal interview. 25 November 2014.). One of the younger teams had to create something 3 dimensional on the computer and they re-

create with Legos. One of the little girls on a team helped her group make a “futuristic” looking house with clean landscape and they won 1st place and each team member won a Chromebook. The aqua team created a video with a theme in mind (such as family or community) and picked a song to go along with their video and again each 1st place team member won a Chromebook (Gonzalez, Juanita. Fieldnotes. 15 November 2014.).

Family Recognition

The parents had to create a collage with the pictures that they had learned to copy and paste and send through email of how technology could help their families. One parent created a collage of a tree and with pictures in the branches. She explained that one picture was a doctor as he told her that he would take care of her if she was ever sick. Another picture was of the world and it was for her smaller child since it is limitless as to what he could decide to do in the future. When she described the whole tree/branch concept it was thoughtfully explained and she put into words how she could help her children and family with technology. She did not win a Chromebook like the children (as she would get this upon completion of the program). She got a \$100 gift certificate to the restaurant of her choice. At the end of the prize giving, Gonzalez and Musel-Gilley gave every single parent a “Certificate of Completion” of the TechComunidad Kick-off and their children came up with them because their pictures were taken as a family (Gonzalez, Juanita. Fieldnotes. 15 November 2014.). This made me wonder if the parent had ever received a certificate before that event.

At the end of the kick-off event, Musel-Gilley explained that they were concluding the kick-off event, but that the actual courses would begin soon and these would last six to eight weeks. From the beginning of the course they would all begin their instruction on their very own Chromebook. She told them that if they successfully completed the program, and they passed the exam at the end of the six to eight weeks, they would be able to keep their Chromebooks and they would participate in a graduation ceremony. Rosario explained to me that in the past TechComunidades they hadn't awarded them their electronic device until the end of the training and some parents were confused because the electronic device did not match the desktop they had been educated on (Gonzalez, Juanita. Personal interview. 23 April 2015).

One Grandmother's Story

One story that impacted me significantly was a grandmother at TechComunidad. Her name is Maria Luisa and she was at TechComunidad with three of her grandchildren whose ages are 5, 6, and 7. She told me that the children belonged to her son because he had been given custody of all three children and therefore they were also now her children as well. She said her son worked long hours to support them while she made sure they were taken care of. This information impacted me because she was a monolingual Spanish speaker and she bluntly told me, "I really have to learn how to use technology for them. I have had them for a couple of years and I have been struggling without being able to do so many things for them, because I do not know how to use a computer". I had offered to give her a ride as I heard how the children were crying to her

if they really were going to walk home after the Kick-Off event (which had ended at 6:30 p.m.). I drove her about one mile away from RCYF and realized she had walked all the way over there in the morning with her three grandchildren (Gonzalez, Juanita. Fieldnotes. 15 November 2014.).

7. TechComunidad Results

EXPERIENCE WITH CHROMEBOOK

Both the instructors and assistants (Rosario and Alejandra were the instructors and Christina and I assisted) in the evening TechComunidad learned along with the parents. I think to teach and assist the parents with a program where we had no previous experience with the Chromebooks was interesting to say the least. Rosario recalls Googling how to do certain things on the Chromebook in front of the parents (Gonzalez, Juanita. Personal interview. 23 April 2015). When Musel-Gilley described what “in the Cloud” meant and how the parents would benefit greatly from having Chromebooks that would be sustained by the “Cloud”. My previous experience with the Cloud had been from my experience with my I-Phone that I had set-up with Apple, and I was able to backup pictures, messages, and whatever information I had indicated on an on-going basis to Cloud but nothing further until TechComunidad.

Musel-Gilley told the parents at the first class that they no longer needed to worry about having software to support their computers and the Cloud would take care of everything that they would need; and the Cloud would alleviate any stress they may have about getting a computer virus. I remember the ongoing joke that Maria Luisa, the grandmother I had met at TechComunidad Kickoff and I followed closely throughout the program, would say from time to time after an explanation or lesson, she would say, “No pues yo me quede en la nube,” which literally means, *I stayed in the cloud* or in Spanish translated to *I stayed in a confused state*. The information was not only overwhelming for the parents but for the instructors and assistants as well.

Literally all of their applications could be found on their Chromebook in their “Google Drive”. There were new applications with new application names that we had to become accustomed to, such as instead of describing “Word” which is an application for Microsoft, with the Chromebook and specifically through the Gmail account, it was called “Google Doc”. When we were using all of these new terms, I remember being skeptical of having parents learn these non-typical, non-Microsoft application names. I just kept thinking of how I had not seen Chromebooks in the workplace or I simply was unaware of them. I wasn’t sure if all of these new applications would help them effectively if they had to help their child or use a regular desktop at a public library or at home.

After a while in the course, I came to realize that more importantly was that the applications ran in a manner very similar to Microsoft applications in terms of how they functioned. Although they vary in some extent, the concept of how to use them is similar. Something that also reassured me was when Alicia, one of the mothers in the program, said that their child’s school had given each of the students a Chromebook with which to work with at school. I felt like as long as the Chromebooks seemed like something familiar to the family and that it was being used in other places besides RCYF, then it made sense for the parents to be learning on these and being familiar with how to use them. The Chromebooks ultimately fulfilled the goals of the program, which was for the parents to be able to logon to their email and to be used as a way to use search engines.

EMAILS

One of the things that I felt should have been worked on for a longer period of time was the Email training portion of the program. I felt like there should have been more practice with logging on/off from the Gmail account once the parents had created their accounts. I remember that it took us the whole two hours in one session to have the parents create the accounts. They first had to get used to the idea of creating a username and password, which was challenging because they needed a username that was not used and that they could relate to. I tried to think of times in Mexico when you have had to ask someone for a “contraseña” (*password*) and I couldn’t really think of any times.

I remember Don Miguel, a parent in his late 40’s, having the most complicated time trying to log on to his Gmail account the day after he had set his account. I remembered that he never got impatient with the situation. I remembered how at work, I would easily get upset if the computer began to stall. Don Miguel unsuccessfully tried to log on multiple times and finally we decided it was easier to re-set his password. At the end of the whole ordeal, Don Miguel told me, “Lo que pasa es que las cosas van a resultar, simplemente tienes que tener paciencia y seguir intentandolo” (*things will work out, you simply have to have patience and keep trying*). I remember his positive attitude throughout the course because he did keep trying to complete each task even though he fell behind with instruction.

SEARCH ENGINES

Although the course was extremely helpful, at times it was too technical. At one point the parents were taught how to access their settings and set the search engine that they desired. They were able to see Bing, Google, and Yahoo. I thought that search engines were good to be aware of, but to actually teach them about the settings portions and where to change this was a little too much. Although the setting portion was important because this was where they learned to set the “language,” I thought to also change from the default Google search engines to others was a little too much.

What I did feel was helpful was the way the parents were required to search for the following websites and asked to bookmark them: austinisd.org/parents (where they could find the Parent Cloud that I will later speak about), educaaustin.org (where they could find ESL programs in Austin), bigfuture.collegboard.org (where they could find schools to compare for tuition rates, admissions requirements, scholarships, resources for students and parents to be college ready), noticias.univision.com/educacion/ (contains information about going to college and scholarships in Spanish), scholastic.com (website with helpful information for educators, parents, students, and place to purchase books). I think there could have been a little more explanation or clarity on what each website contained. I think the parents were so nervous about making sure they knew how to bookmark these websites that the instructors overlooked at the purpose of bookmarking these. Although one of RCYF’s strengths had tended to be their focus on helping Latino parents understand the context of what is important for them in helping with their children or grandchildren’s education, this episode shows that sometimes the urge to

teach the technology can overshadow the reason for learning the technology, to help their children find the resources they need for education and career planning. Rosario commented that River City Youth Foundation could benefit from having a more experienced teacher that could create creative lesson plans where there is learning, but it is also an enjoyable experience (Gonzalez, Juanita. Personal interview. 23 April 2015).

FACEBOOK APPEARS AT TECHCOMUNIDAD

By the third week into the TechComunidad program, a lot of the parents that had Facebook on their phones, had figured out how to log onto it through their Chromebooks. I walked in there one day and noticed that at the beginning of the class at least five parents were on their Facebook pages. Maria Luisa was very interesting to focus on because she had a complete transformation in her technology experience. She started by being extremely hesitant with her Chromebook and ended up her own Facebook account. She realized she was able to communicate with cousins and her son in Mexico through Facebook. She noticed how a lot of her peers had access to Facebook because of their cell phones and now on their Chromebooks. She wanted to be as technology savvy as the other parents seemed to be (those that had social media on their cell phones seemed to learn faster according to her); determined to learn, she purchased a smartphone halfway through the program so that she could learn how to use Facebook and WhatsApp. Her description of the Facebook experience was humorous. She said, “When I learned what Facebook was capable of and how I could upload pictures to this and see my friends and family that I had not seen in years, it was overwhelming.” She recounts her experience in

Spanish, “Un dia estaba yo en Facebook hasta las 3 de la mañana y te juro Juanita que me puse a rezar porque yo dije entre mi, Dios mio que estoy hacienda aqui en esta cosa hasta las 3 de la mañana. Yo dije no, mejor voy a ponerme rezar para que se me quite este vicio.” (*One day I was on Facebook till 3 in the morning and I swear Juanita, I started praying because I thought to myself, my God, what am I doing on this thing till 3 in the morning. I need to get rid of this vice.*) One of the first things Maria Luisa did was take pictures of herself with her instructors at TechComunidad and she uploaded these to Facebook as I ran across these when she “friended” me.

PARENT CLOUD-AUSTIN ISD

One important thing to mention as well is that the parents learn to access their children’s grades or absences online, as sometimes parents are unaware that they are able to access this. At the beginning of the course Musel-Gilley explains to the parents that she wants the parents to have tools that will ensure that they as parents can do more for their children and one way is by being able to see how their children are doing in school through the Parent Cloud-Austin ISD. She told the parents that this portion would be important to because it would give them a lot of points for the exam at the end. We learned about the Parent Cloud-Austin ISD in the curriculum because it was part of a “Google” search activity where parents had to find the webpage and bookmark the page. When the parents were made aware of the AISD webpage and the Parent Cloud, I didn’t realize that it would be the beginning of a challenging experience for both the parents and TechComunidad support. The Parent Cloud was extremely hard to use. First, it was very

hard to create an account. A lot of the parents struggled because of the following reasons:

- 1) The student's name and parent's name had to be exactly as they had registered their child. This was tricky if the child or parent had a first name, middle name, and two last names. The parents had to try multiple attempts. Although it would seem upfront and logical, I remember how my own mother due to language barriers had confused the "middle name" as asking for her last name; so my middle name is my mother's maiden name.
- 2) The phone number also had to be precise. This was challenging because at the time that the child was registered, they were not sure which phone number their spouse had used if they hadn't gone themselves. Also some of them had changed numbers and couldn't recall the phone number they had at the time they registered their child.
- 3) The address also had to be written correctly as well, so if there were any extra symbols or spaces such as periods after abbreviations, it would prevent them from creating the account. I think for the most part it took about four attempts because we had to narrow down the possible problems as to why it wasn't allowing the account to be created.

When I felt like we had tried to target every possible problem and the application was still denying access, I finally told the parent to visit the school and get a print out of the registration of the student's record. This way we knew how all information was

originally submitted. Alicia, a single mother, took weeks to access her child's information, actually had to visit the school about four times before she finally got the help she needed. She had originally been granted access but then there were issues with the password and she needed it re-set. During the times she visited, no one was able to help her and this stressed her because she was taking time off work to get the information. Another thing Rosario did also note that once parents logged onto the system, there wasn't a setting to translate the page (Gonzalez, Juanita. Personal interview. 23 April 2015.). She said that parents didn't understand what the tabs meant because they didn't know how to read English. She said there was also confusion with the different color of interfaces for the Parent Cloud. The original logon page is bright with red and white and once you log into the system it becomes black. This makes the parents think that they have accidentally opened another webpage. She said she hoped there would be consistent interfaces for less confusion (Gonzalez, Juanita. Personal interview. 23 April 2015.).

However challenging the Parent Cloud seemed to be, once parents accessed their children's information, they were elated. They knew if their children had missing homework assignments, had inaccurate absences, etc. They knew how to contact their child's teacher. The parents felt like they were now able to support their child, by knowing how they were doing.

8. TechComunidad Discussion

RELATIONSHIPS

Throughout my experience with TechComunidad, I could see a lot of changes in the parents from when they first began the program in January and April. I could see the importance of the relationships that developed with the instructors, assistants, and their peers. I noticed that parent/instructor relationships transcend the traditional educational boundaries. As Rodriguez asserts, “Just because a student and teacher are placed in the same social space does not automatically guarantee actions [are] wrought with caring” (438). In each passing class I could see increased level of trust that was developed within the group. The comfort level with the instructors allowed for the parents to gain confidence and trust that they would succeed (Duncan-Andrade 183). The relationships grew to the extent that the parents threw a pregnant instructor a baby shower two-thirds of the way into the course. I remember Lidia, one of the more advanced parents, organizing. She scheduled it the Wednesday after spring break and that we were all to bring some kind of food to share. The parents brought “tinga” (*shredded chicken in a chipotle sauce*), nachos, homemade salsa, cake and gifts. There was noticeable “recognition” and the voice that was given to each parent in TechComunidad that allowed the sharing of personal event with the instructor and the parents (Rodriguez 440).

This reminded me of my initial interactions with RCYF and how the staff put care into celebrating birthdays for the children during the summer camp. This is a unique

environment because they take the time to make sure that children feel celebrated and welcomed. The display of “cariño” (*affection*) was very familiar to me, so from the beginning I treated the parents as if they were my “tías/os” (*aunts/uncles*) and “primas/os” (*cousins*). I maintained the manners of respect that was taught to me by my parents of always speaking to the adults that were older than I in a formal manner with “Usted” (*formal way of saying “you” in Spanish*) and those that were close to my age or younger “Tú” (*informal way of saying “you” in Spanish*). This was also the respectful demeanor that Alejandra, Rosario, and Christina displayed with the parents.

There was always food available for families at TechComunidad and this allowed parents to come straight from work with their children; it was extremely convenient for them to be able to get meals at the center. I know that this has always been a way of unifying community, by sharing a meal. This is something that I know is important to Gonzalez, she thinks getting to know the families is vital. She spoke about how it is important to know not only the families, but also the extended families through their programs. She says “Conocimiento” (*knowing them*), that they were an organization that the community could trust (Gonzalez, Juanita. Personal interview. 29 November 2014.). It is very important to take note of what Latino families are familiar with and what they are used to. It reminded me of one of the small faith groups at my church, where one of the women’s Spanish groups has kept their group meeting on a weekly basis for several years now, and I remember one important part of their meeting is to share a meal together in a form of potluck every week just before their activity began.

LIMITED SPACE AT TECHCOMUNIDAD

Although TechComunidad offered two sessions weekly, one session given twice a week in the mornings and the other session given twice a week in the evenings, River City Youth Foundation has a huge need for additional space. The structure of TechComunidad was rather difficult because there were supposed to be two ongoing groups learning the TechComunidad material at different rates. One table initially had parents that were somewhat technologically skilled and the other table had parents that had limited or absolutely no technological skills. This was a challenging set-up as Rosario instructed the higher level parents and Alejandra gave instruction to the other parents at the same time and in the same space. Paying attention during the training was near impossible. After three weeks the instructors went ahead and combined the two groups and co-taught about 26 parents. By the end of the program around 21 parents took the final exams.

When I interviewed Musel-Gilley in November of 2014 and asked what she would want for RCYF, she had specified the need for additional space. The necessity in providing enough learning space for both the parents and the children is vital if RCYF wants TechComunidad to be successful. It definitely needs more classrooms to accommodate all of the children and parents that benefit from their services and programs. The daycare provided for infants and toddlers was in the administrative/lobby area; the rest of the children were set up with tents outside with tables and chairs (this requires a lot of set-up and take down by the staff). I feel like some of the energy exerted

by staff for setting up and taking down the outside spaces could have been a time devoted to development and lesson planning for the staff.

Sometimes the weather interfered with the learning activities for the children, and although heaters were always provided outside for the children's activities in cold weather with tents, to "ignore" the obvious rain/wind was unmanageable. By having the children groups placed outside, the children were limited in their permissible activities and were easily distracted by the other groups in other areas since there were no walls of separation. At one point when it was a rainy and cold night, they moved the children to a nearby church. Much time that is lost in the transporting of children back and forth from RCYF. A lot of the parents were able to partake in TechComunidad because they were able to take their children, while they were taking the computer course. Building additional classrooms for RCYF would be extremely beneficial for the community in Dove Springs.

PARENTS' THOUGHTS ON TECHNOLOGY AND EDUCATION

I interviewed three women that participated in the TechComunidad Kickoff in November to gather information prior to when the TechComunidad began in January; Guillermina, Elizabeth and Maria Luisa. I interviewed all of them prior to or one week into the TechComunidad courses in January of 2015. I gathered information on what they wished to gain, what they felt their roles as parents were, and how they felt about education.

Guillermina was a forty-eight year old woman from Mexico. She finished the 3rd grade in Mexico and has two daughters that are not in the River City Youth Program. She said that she knew that she had to learn how to use the computer as she didn't know how to access her timesheets and these are only available online. She also said that she needed to renew her health insurance every year and could only do this online. She said in previous years she was able to fill out hardcopies, but now everything was online only. I asked her how she currently accessed this information and she said she accessed it by having her niece do it all for her, or through a very nice bilingual administrative assistant at work. She said she really needed the course for work and to be able to help her daughters find information (Gonzalez, Juanita. Personal interview. November 2014.). I knew that she took her role as a parent and her children's education seriously as when the testing began for one of her daughters in late March; she attended meetings with school administrators. They had removed her daughter from an English course and put her in a Spanish course for the testing preparation. She said that her daughter was coming home very upset because she was not fluent in Spanish and was confused as to why they had moved her. She said that she needed to make sure her ten year-old daughter was switched and needed to support her during this stressful time. She was teaching her daughter that she needed to speak up if there was an unjust situation, such as being switched from a class for no apparent reason. Although Guillermina completed 90% of the course and did not take the final exams, I know that she gained confidence in her use of technology and in approaching the school administrators.

Elizabeth is a thirty-four year-old homemaker from Mexico who finished the ninth grade in Mexico she said she finished the “secundaria”. She had the most experience with technology out of the three women that I interviewed. She told me that she had Facebook on her phone, but still was unsure of how to find information on the internet. She said she wanted to learn how to use the internet to find more information. She said that education is very important and believes schooling will help her children. She felt that her parental role with education was to support her 15 year-old daughter, 10 year-old son, and 8-year old as much as possible and to help them find the help they needed if she was unable to. When asked about how much education she believed her children needed, she said the more they study, the more effort they put in, then they will have a better future. She said her daughter wants to be a doctor, her ten year-old son wants to do something in technology, and her youngest son is unsure of what he wants to do. She said that her ten year-old son was in the RCYF program (Gonzalez, Juanita. Personal interview. 20 January 2015.).

Maria Luisa, is the fifty-seven year-old grandmother from Mexico that I speak the most about in my research. She said finished ninth grade or “secundaria” in Mexico. She has three sons in Austin and came fifteen years ago from Mexico. She said that she had no idea that she would have three grandchildren to raise and this was why she wanted to attend TechComunidad. She knows that technology is important for homework and to communicate with the teachers; she knows she will need this because her grandchildren are so young. She said that her only experience with computers prior to TechComunidad was that she had cleaned them in offices. When I asked her about education, she said, “It

doesn't matter if you clean homes, you should get more education.” What is her parent role with education? She said she gives them education, which can be interpreted as manners and values that are taught at home. I understood that she was referring the upbringing in the home. She says she is responsible for this. Her education goal for them is attendance at the university. She thinks her role is to find them opportunities to for them to have a “una educación formal” (*formal education*). She did say that even though she is fifty-seven, she will be educating herself so that they know that they must “estudiar, estudiar, estudiar” (*study, study, study*) (Gonzalez, Juanita. Personal interview. 26 January 2015.).

TECHCOMUNIDAD PARENT RESULTS

At the first TechComunidad course, all of the parents were asked why they were there and they all had different responses and these included wanting to: be able to look for jobs, help their children with their homework, look for cooking ideas and recipes, find information, learn to create folders, respond to teachers' emails, supervise children's activities, email attachments, monitor what their children are doing, organize the computer, track down their child's teacher, write letters, use applications, see messages from school, make payments, and monitor children's grades online (Gonzalez, Juanita. Fieldnotes. 14 January 2015.).

When I informally interviewed parents in the evening course after their final exam, I learned what some of them learned from TechComunidad. Hilda said she learned a lot and what she found most helpful was learning to create folders in her email and to

organize them. When I asked her how she thought the course might help her with her children's school, she said that now she knows how to use the computer better. In regards to work, she now orders Mary Kay products online, which is a business that she wants to pursue. She said she doesn't want to settle for less and wants to show her children that they can do better. When I asked Sofia what she learned she said she learned a lot. She said it will help her because now she won't have to bother her teenage and make him pay the bills online. She said that she is now able to do it herself. Alicia said she liked learning Google applications and how to explore the internet. She said that she is very happy that she can now see how her child is doing in school with the Parent Austin ISD Cloud. Ruben said that he wished that the course would have gone at a slower pace because he felt like he was behind. He did state however that he worked in maintenance for an apartment complex and before the course he knew that people could order parts online, but he didn't know how they did this (he would buy these in person or over the phone). He said he was confident that he would be able to order the parts online too. He also mentioned that because of the course, he was able to help his eight year-old daughter with a science project. He said that before he took the course all he would have known about a Zebra is that they eat grass, but because of the course he was able to "Google" more information. He said that they were able to expand on her project and give more details about the life of a Zebra (Gonzalez, Juanita. Fieldnotes. 16 April 2015.).

ROSY AND LETICIA

I was also interested in seeing what the children were expecting from the program. Therefore I interviewed two ten year-old girls in my study named Rosy and Leticia before the program began. Their experience with technology was limited to the phone as they had applications and access to the internet on the phone. The only other place they could access the internet was at school. When I asked them about their experience with computers, Rosy and Leticia both said that they didn't understand them very much. Rosy said computers confused her. I asked them how they thought the program would help their parent, Rosy said she thought her mom would show her how to download stuff. Leticia said she thought the program would show her mom how to teach her things she didn't know (Gonzalez, Juanita. Personal interview. November 2014.).

9. Conclusion

The objective of this research was to investigate whether River City Youth Foundation's technology and parent technology education program could be a tool to help decrease the social divide for Latino middle-school children and their families in other Austin locations. TechComunidad is unique because they have a high retention rate. I believe this is due to the cultural and family sensitivity that RCYF embodies. The ambient feels familiar because all of the staff working there are bilingual and bicultural. The technology course is taught Spanish, their native language. The children benefit because they are learning or partaking in positive experiences at RCYF, while the parents are learning things like bookmarking the AISD webpage. All of these factors contribute to the 80% success rate that I found in the evening TechComunidad sessions. If those factors were to be replicated, I highly recommend TechComunidad be a program that can be offered in other parts of Austin to ultimately help Latino parents and their children.

River City Youth Foundation fosters a community that implements their organization's goals, where children begin to think about their education and long-term goals. Even though the three mothers interviewed could not pinpoint the exact degrees their children should obtain through education, I know that they are instilling a wealth of knowledge or aiding the children in having a disposition to learn that can only come from their example. Specifically, Guillermina's presence at her daughter's school when she needed her there, Elizabeth guiding her children's future ambitions, and Maria Luisa's determination to learn more for her grandchildren. After completing TechComunidad, I know children like Rosy and Leticia will be further supported by their parents with

technology. Their parents will be able to help them understand the computer. Based on my experience with the TechComunidad, I believe parents leave the program feeling empowered and feeling like they will be able to provide further guidance to their children.

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